113 more ground than ours, since it even includes a discussion of the Mbole.

H. Brepoels, "Het Familiehoofd bij de Nkundó-Negers," Congo, 1930, Vol. 2, p. 332.

124 We have tried to make our data as complete as possible. We have given here not only the major trends and basic principles, but also the particulars, even those that seem most insignificant. They are always interesting, and sometimes more so than one may have suspected at first. All the material has been discussed over and over again, in private and in public, with very varied people at different times and places, and the points that presented the greatest difficulty were gone over countless times.

121 In general we have preferred to use the descriptive and analytic method. We have drawn conclusions and principles from the data. Although case histories naturally lengthened the text of this work, we have not hesitated to insert them at various points. They are the best means of bringing out certain rules or customs and bringing to life the psychology of our people.

121 69 In this respect a remark should be made whose importance deserves our attention for a moment. The examination of judicial cases of which we have been direct or indirect witnesses does not provide a scientific certainty about the laws -- or "the customs," to use the term so frequently applied (1). For not all [16] that is done

1. It is unfortunate that this term has become so fashionable, for it lacks precision. Indeed, it may mean simply "practice, usage," or it may be used in the legal sense of "a practice having the force of a law." Often a confusion between the two meanings is created, and all customs are considered to be legally obligatory, when actually, some practices are outside common law, and others are in opposition to it. For the sake of precision in ethnographic and ethnological works, it would be well to use this ambiguous term as little as possible and to distinguish clearly among legal procedures, the laws and customs or usage.

121 all fulfilled in one person. But such individuals do exist, if in the
69 person of the investigator they find sympathy, broad ideas, a lack of all European racism, understanding, a knowledge of their language, and a benevolent devotion to their interests, individually and as a group.

Even if one has the good fortune to find a native who, after
121 much experience, reaches the point where he will say spontaneously:
124 "This is done often, but it is against the law; the law says thus and so; this decision of the tribunal was partial for such or such reason," -- an infinitely valuable situation, but one which arises very rarely -- one is not thereby absolved of the need to check his statements. But the further one goes, the more it is possible to be aware of the reality and to appraise the informant's value in this sphere and the usefulness of his statements.

These considerations are particularly valuable in making the
121 distinction between obligations and social decorum or good manners,
183 between legal obligations and obligations of kinship and mutual
671 assistance. In current practice the Nkundó make no clear lines of demarcation between these categories, since they have never codified their law or attempted to set up a clear and precise classification. They feel no more need for this than, for instance, they or even we "civilized" people bother about setting up a grammar for our native tongue, which we speak correctly and without the slightest difficulty, purely out of habit.

An investigation in the legal domain is made [18] very diffi-
[19] cult by the patriarchal and feudal character of these peoples, added to the lack of writing. Not only is there an adaptation to circumstances -- the felicitous flexibility of native laws -- in which jurisprudence plays a great role, but the Nkundó, while knowing well what is lawful and what is not, generally does not clearly understand the nature of an obligation, and above all he does not know its source.

One's chances of obtaining good results in the inquiry are
121 greatly increased by the use of hypothetical cases, presented to the
124 individuals one knows best and whom one knows to be in no way involved. It is always worthwhile to use this method as a means of completing and perhaps correcting conclusions based on the examination

[2] of actual legal cases. It is almost impossible to gain access to the
[2] latter unless one is armed with an official order. A thorough knowledge of the language of the tribe in question is required, however, for the use of imaginary cases.

In describing various laws and practices, we have tried to reproduce the explanations given by the Nkundó and to add our own views when it has seemed appropriate to do so. The careful reader will have no trouble distinguishing between these two very different sources.

[2] I am very well aware that many ethnologists do not like chercheurs de brousse [bush explorers] to become involved in these questions, and that they prefer to receive from the latter only raw data on which they can build their theories. All ethnographers of the bush and forest will readily recognize their inadequacy in matters of theory. But this very real disadvantage due to a lack of training is offset by a definite advantage. They know the natives much more intimately, not only with respect to the immediate subject of their study, but also as regards other aspects of their lives, particularly their psychological make-up and general mentality, with which they may have had direct and daily contact for many years. [18] They are therefore more likely to come to conclusions which are in accordance with reality. The "armchair" ethnologists sometimes seem to assume that the men in the bush are capable of being no more than collectors of data. Yet the majority of them have had an intermediate education, especially in the humanities, and many of them have attended institutions of higher learning (universities and others). There are professional jurists among them, for example. Therefore, these observers are capable of reliable judgments, and many of them, through their studies in philosophy, are equipped with the rules of logic and highly developed critical powers.

It is true that it is not up to us to build theories; the range of our investigations is always limited. A knowledge of theories is very interesting and useful, but it is by no means necessary. In fact such knowledge may sometimes be dangerous, since it is easy for it to unduly influence our judgment in a way that is against the best interests of science. Thus we do not care whether our facts are in

[14] I should like to express one more wish relevant to this subject. A number of studies by civil servants and government agents, containing a good deal of ethnographic data on various subjects, lie in holes in the bureaus of the Congo, waiting for the day when they will serve as fodder for ever-hungry termites. Would it not be possible to make these documents -- at least the better ones -- available to the public? Even if they contain gaps and errors, they will be gratefully received. They will lead other researchers to explore these questions thoroughly, and through emulation, criticism, and discussion, we will develop an increasing and more accurate knowledge of the natives, [21] their history, their way of life, their laws, their customs, and their mentality, which will be of great benefit for all colonial work.

Some of the terms used in one or another part of this study may appear too coarse. I would rather have avoided them, but I would have had to use veiled expressions and circumlocutions which would have adversely affected the clarity of this work and therefore its value, for it is intended for a purely scientific purpose. I trust the indulgent reader will therefore excuse their presence.

● [24] Here and there case histories are given in full. I believe that the details are not without interest, since they give a living picture of the mentality of our people. Most of the incidents were [25] collected in the vicinity of Flandria, the area with which I am most familiar. Here and there I have taken the liberty of passing judgment and of recommending solutions to certain problems. I should like to say that in these cases I am expressing opinions which are purely personal.

000 The map appended to this work makes it possible for the reader to find a tribe or village which is under discussion and shows its geographic position amidst the groups that comprise the Mongo-Nkundo people.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who have in some way contributed to this work: His Excellency Monsignor Ed. Van Goethem, our venerable vicar apostolic, who gave me permission to carry it out and always encouraged me in my research, understanding fully its practical value for a sensible adaptation which will enable us to establish the Church on a firm foundation; my colleagues, Father Trilgalet and Father Wauters, as well as Brother Bram, who took upon

C. An attempt to explain the modern changes. The facts themselves as much as a knowledge of human nature, together with the lenient attitude of parents and the lack of sanctions (the last two points are relevant only to relations between adults), are in direct contradiction to the statements of the natives. Should these not therefore be explained as exaggerations, stemming from a desire for national glory and a resentment of the situation created by colonization? The natives whose strange assertions I have cited are elderly and serious; they demonstrate all the qualities of truthful witnesses. But are they not -- perhaps unconsciously -- laudatores temporis acti? I thought so for a long time and never allowed their statements to carry any weight. I have discussed this question over and over again, not with one or two natives, but with dozens of the most serious and sincere people, under various circumstances and in regions far removed from one another. Yet all supported the same argument, and I could never make my point of view prevail. I always received the same reply: "You Whites are not willing to believe us when we tell you what we know better than you, what is the pure truth. You are so involved in your own point of view!" Finally, before so much formal testimony -- uniform, unchanging, repeated ad nauseum in such varied circumstances as to individuals, times, and places -- my attachment to my own idea began, with some regret, to falter.

But how is it possible to resolve the contradiction between a rather broad liberty and the practice of chastity? And above all how can less than fifty years have sufficed to transform any attachment to virginity into licentiousness? The difficulty presents itself for relations between adults, but it is especially great with respect to reprehensible contacts between nonadults, because of the terrible sanction that we have described above.

The first objection may be partially met if we take into account the habit of "the fear of men," which is acquired and maintained through the severe prohibition against sexual relations before physical maturity and the terrible punishment with which the transgressor is threatened. [&c]

The second objection on the other hand is much more serious. It is the one which above all has always kept me from accepting the